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A MODERN DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE.

A Joint Protest Addressed to the Imperial Chancellor, von Hertling, February 16, 1918, by the Deputies and Senators Present in Occupied Belgium.

EXCELLENCY, on the 19th of January of the current year there appeared on the walls of our cities a notice in which some 15 persons declare, in the name of a so-called council of Flanders, the autonomy of the Flemish provinces, and claim thus to sanction the division of our country into two States, in breach of our constitution and national sovereignty.

At the same time the newspapers announced that a delegation from this council had been received by Dr. von Walraf, German Secretary of State for Internal Affairs, and had declared to him that they were the mouth-piece of the Flemish people and had been kindly treated by him.

Excellency, since your accession to power you have expressed in no uncertain terms your respect for the will of the people, such as expresses itself in the majority of a parliament when legally elected.

At your side and like you, your allies have declared as one of the ruling principles of a future peace their will to abstain from all interference in the internal affairs of other people, while at the same time claiming on their side that all interference in their own political organization had been avoided. (Speech of Prime Minister Seidler of Nov. 30, 1917.) Like you, they have pointed out that only the parliament, along with the other competent agencies, has, according to the constitution, the right of deciding questions which relate to the internal policies of a nation. (Speech of Count Czernin, Jan. 24, 1918.)

We do not know whether, in these circumstances and in spite of principles so definite and declarations so formal, it enters into the intentions of your government to accord any attention to the declarations of the council of Flanders.

But we, legal representatives of the nation, are in duty bound to remove every ambiguity and to admit no usurpation of our powers. The so-called council of Flanders holds no public charge in Belgium. It is foreign to our constitutional and legal institutions. It has come into being, no one knows how or by whose will. In fact, its exact composition, its rôle, and its functions are still for the most part unknown. In vain could it claim for itself any authority in fact or any moral consideration in the country. It possesses neither. The Flemish deputies and senators, the heads of the great political and literary associations, who are the authorized representatives of the Flemish movement, have protested against the part which this council arrogates to itself and against the policy which it pursues, and they have let it be published that its acts do not correspond either to the Flemish program or to the wishes of the Flemish people. (Protest addressed to von Bethmann-Hollweg on March 10, 1917.)

They have rightly proclaimed that the question of languages is concerned with our internal policies, and that it has been made the object of numerous measures, generally voted almost unanimously, and that we shall

be able to regulate it after peace is restored among ourselves, by the free exercise of our national institutions, in a spirit of harmony and justice, as becomes a nation which has undergone for its honor and its right unprecedented trials without weakening.

What value can one attach, under such circumstances, to the declarations and acts of a group with neither power nor legal right, which borrows an apparent importance only from the fact that, thanks to the censorship of the press and the restrictions placed upon the right to meet and to form associations, it has only the right of speech, and presents according to its understanding its utterances and the reception which public opinion gives them.

Recently, it is true, the council of Flanders announced that it submitted itself for re-election. An official record shows that a meeting, called one day in advance, was held in a theater at Brussels. Anybody came who wished—Belgians and strangers, men, women, or children. There were in all 600 or 700 persons. It is these unknown people, met together by chance, without direction or guarantee, who, in a few moments, as an interlude to a discourse, proclaimed the election of 22 deputies to the council of Flanders and 52 provisional councillors, and it is thus that, unbeknown to its population, the wish of the arrondissement of Brussels, which numbers 200,000 electors and nearly a million inhabitants, was expressed.

Every honest man will admit that such procedures are ridiculous. In no organized and free country can resolutions of meetings arbitrarily composed and deliberating without either right or authority be substituted for the representative bodies or the legal forms for the administration of the country.

Neither have the constituted powers disappeared nor could they disappear in Belgium. The municipal councils, the provincial councils, are still active. They are chosen by the system of general suffrage, direct and secret. Would that they might be assembled. Already the provincial council of Antwerp, the essentially Flemish municipal councils of Antwerp, Malines, St. Nicolas, Turnhout, etc., those of Brussels and its suburbs, and numerous other communes have on the occasion of projects for administrative separation shown their desire for unity, and that in no doubtful terms; but the German authority has prevented them from considering the question. May this interdiction be removed. Everywhere the attitude of the council of Flanders will find a signal disavowal in these public bodies which are constantly in direct contact with public opinion.

The deputies and senators attest by their signatures at the foot of this protest that they oppose every attempt upon our national institutions, and certainly one could not legitimately prefer to the legal representatives of the nation the manifestoes of people without authority who have all, or nearly all, accepted their appointments, promotions, emoluments from the German administration in Belgium.

What would you, what would any German patriot, think if, when a part of Germany was occupied there were found Germans who would call upon the aid of the enemy with a view to dividing the Empire and overthrowing its constitution?

History shows how fragile are the arbitrary arrange-

ments which the invader attempts to impose upon peoples temporarily vanquished, and it is not necessary to go far back in your own annals of history to see what a proud and patriotic people would do.

According to article 25 of the Belgium constitution, "all powers emanate from the nation."

"They are exercised in the manner established by the constitution." Beyond this principle, which is at the basis of the institutions of all free peoples, there is nothing but the arbitrary and fantastic, and this fundamental rule forms a part of the legal provisions for which the invader should show respect, according to the terms of article 43 of The Hague Convention.

Excellency, it is not for us to foresee the policy which your government will decide to follow in this matter; but against the acts of those who in time of war attempt to rend their murdered country we, the legal representatives of the nation, wish to raise an energetic and indignant protest. We absolutely deny them any authority and any right whatever of acting in the name of the country or of speaking in the name of all or a part of our people.

OUR "DECLARATION OF WAR TO A FINISH."

PRESIDENT WILSON'S THIRD LIBERTY LOAN SPEECH IN BALTIMORE, APRIL 6, 1918.

(The above title is the characterization of President Wilson's address given it by the Paris newspaper, *Le Matin*.)

FELLOW-CITIZENS: This is the anniversary of our acceptance of Germany's challenge to fight for our right to live and be free, and for the sacred rights of freemen everywhere. The nation is awake. There is no need to call to it. We know what the war must cost, our utmost sacrifice, the lives of our fittest men, and, if need be, all that we possess.

The loan we are met to discuss is one of the least parts of what we are called upon to give and to do, though in itself imperative. The people of the whole country are alive to the necessity of it, and are ready to lend to the utmost, even where it involves a sharp skimping and daily sacrifice to lend out of meagre earnings. They will look with reprobation and contempt upon those who can and will not, upon those who demand a higher rate of interest, upon those who think of it as a mere commercial transaction. I have not come, therefore, to urge the loan. I have come only to give to you, if I can, a more vivid conception of what it is for.

The reasons for this great war, the reason why it had to come, the need to fight it through, and the issues that hang upon its outcome, are more clearly disclosed now than ever before. It is easy to see just what this particular loan means, because the cause we are fighting for stands more sharply revealed than at any previous crisis of the momentous struggle. The man who knows least can now see plainly how the cause of justice stands and what the imperishable thing he is asked to invest in. Men in America may be more sure than they ever were before that the cause is their own, and that, if it should be lost, their own great nation's place and mission in the world would be lost with it.

I call you to witness, my fellow-countrymen, that at no stage of this terrible business have I judged the purposes of Germany intemperately. I should be ashamed in the presence of affairs so grave, so fraught with the destinies of mankind throughout all the world, to speak with truculence, to use the weak language of hatred or vindictive purpose. We must judge as we would be judged. I have sought to learn the objects Germany has in this war from the mouths of her own spokesmen, and to deal as frankly with them as I wished them to deal with me. I have laid bare our own ideals, our own purposes, without reserve or doubtful phrase, and have asked them to say as plainly what it is that they seek.

We have ourselves proposed no injustice, no aggression. We are ready, whenever the final reckoning is made, to be just to the German people, deal fairly with the German power, as with all others. There can be no difference between peoples in the final judgment, if it is indeed to be a righteous judgment. To propose anything but justice, even-handed and dispassionate justice, to Germany at any time, whatever the outcome of the war, would be to renounce and dishonor our own cause, for we ask nothing that we are not willing to accord.

It has been with this thought that I have sought to learn from those who spoke for Germany whether it was justice or dominion and the execution of their own will upon the other nations of the world that the German leaders were seeking. They have answered—answered in unmistakable terms. They have avowed that it was not justice, but dominion and the unhindered execution of their own will. The avowal has not come from Germany's statesmen. It has come from her military leaders, who are her real rulers. Her statesmen have said that they wished peace, and were ready to discuss its terms whenever their opponents were willing to sit down at the conference table with them. Her present Chancellor has said—in indefinite and uncertain terms, indeed, and in phrases that often seem to deny their own meaning, but with as much plainness as he thought prudent—that he believed that peace should be based upon the principles which we had declared would be our own in the final settlement.

At Brest-Litovsk her civilian delegates spoke in similar terms; professed their desire to conclude a fair peace and accord to the peoples with whose fortunes they were dealing the right to choose their own allegiances. But action accompanied and followed the profession. Their military masters, the men who act for Germany and exhibit her purpose in execution, proclaimed a very different conclusion. We cannot mistake what they have done—in Russia, in Finland, in the Ukraine, in Rumania. The real test of their justice and fair play has come. From this we may judge the rest.

They are enjoying in Russia a cheap triumph, in which no brave or gallant nation can long take pride. A great people, helpless by their own act, lies for the time at their mercy. Their fair professions are forgotten. They nowhere set up justice, but everywhere impose their power and exploit everything for their own use and aggrandizement, and the peoples of conquered provinces are invited to be free under their dominion!

Are we not justified in believing that they would do the same things at their western front if they were not